



**ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

**Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria  
Past and Future Challenges to the Chemical Weapons Convention  
Speech by the Director-General of the OPCW  
Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü**

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*REMARKS AS DELIVERED*

His Excellency, Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished members of the International Club,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

To begin with, it is a pleasure to be here at the International Club of the Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria, in the historic Stalhoff at the heart of this beautiful city. Allow me to express my appreciation for your interest in global disarmament and non-proliferation and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Regrettably my first presentation scheduled for November last year had to be cancelled due to urgent and unexpected business in The Hague, but I am happy to be able to finally address you all.

I would also like to take this moment to convey my gratitude to Dr Schüssel for acting as moderator.

As a former chancellor of Austria, you follow in the footsteps of Leopold Figl, Austria's first post-war chancellor, as well as foreign minister and co-founder of the original Austrian League of the United Nations, from which this Club draws its lineage. His vision of Austria's role as bridging existing differences between nations helped cement Vienna as a centre for international peace and security. Today, Vienna hosts numerous United Nations institutions, including key arms control bodies such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO).

Austria itself has been an active and longstanding supporter of disarmament. Indeed, when Leopold Figl spoke as the foreign minister of Austria at the UN General Assembly in 1957 about the newly established IAEA, he stated '[h]ere is an opportunity to substitute deeds for words and

to use the enormous sums which are required for the production of weapons of mass destruction for a better purpose.’

What Figl captured in his statement 60 years ago was something that is still a universal sentiment. The aspiration to rid the world of this class of terrible weapons has been an enduring goal of the international community. But while comprehensive bans of certain WMDs have faced challenges, the successful efforts related to chemical weapons have underscored the potential of international cooperation when political will translates into concrete action.

Since the CWC’s entry into force in 1997, the OPCW has been quietly striving to fulfil its primary objective of eliminating the scourge of chemical weapons. Together with our States Parties, we have made outstanding progress in this regard. Still, much has changed since we began our mission.

The nature of international security is evolving, with new technologies, threats, and actors altering the way in which we perceive the global landscape. Accordingly, the OPCW is adapting—undeniably, it must adapt—to meet this changing environment and the risks and dangers that it has and will create.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On 26 April last year, with the presence of His Majesty The King of the Netherlands and other dignitaries from the host country, permanent representatives to the OPCW and Secretariat staff, gathered in The Hague to celebrate the Twentieth Anniversary of the entry into force of the CWC and the founding of the OPCW. This event commemorated not only two decades of action carried out under the CWC, but also paid homage to the one hundred years of efforts to banish forever the evil of chemical weapons. These efforts deserve elaboration.

A universal taboo against chemical weapons has existed throughout history in the customary rules of warfare. Even though the taboo has been broken numerous times, the trajectory of history has bent towards its codification as a legal norm.

Nonetheless, the first attempts at codifying the norm into international law did not occur until the last days of the Nineteenth Century. It was at the 1899 Hague Peace Conference that the world powers of the time agreed to “abstain from the use ... of asphyxiating or deleterious gases.”

This agreement proved incapable, however, of preventing the unrestricted use of chemical weapons during the First World War. The industrialised nature of the conflict saw the application of chemistry to total warfare, with horrific consequences. Over the course of the war chemical weapons would kill 90,000 soldiers and leave almost a million more with permanent and debilitating injuries.

Abhorrence to this form of warfare, on all sides, triggered renewed interest in prohibiting the deployment of chemicals weapons. This led to the first truly global arms control agreement, the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the prohibition of chemical and biological weapons in international armed conflicts.

The Geneva Protocol reflected public revulsion towards chemical weapons and constituted a moral and legal leap forward, but it still fell far short of a comprehensive ban. While prohibiting use, it was silent on such issues as the development and acquisition of chemical warfare agents.

Over the decades after the Geneva Protocol, chemical weapons continued to be used to devastating effect across multiple conflicts. Accordingly, the international community persisted in its attempts to achieve a comprehensive ban. But it was not until 1980 that formal negotiations commenced in the Conference on Disarmament for such an instrument, with the final text of the CWC opened for signature in 1993. It eventually entered into force four years later in April 1997.

What was created in Geneva was a unique, multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation treaty that banned an entire category of WMDs and required the destruction of declared chemical arsenals under strict verification. Over the past two decades the OPCW has worked to facilitate the full and effective implementation of the Convention. In that relatively short period of time the Organisation has recorded a number of remarkable achievements and worked hard to strengthen the CWC's provisions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The CWC is made up of four inter-related pillars: chemical disarmament, non-proliferation, assistance and protection, and promotion of the peaceful uses of chemistry. These pillars are crucial aspects to the CWC's work as they guide its activities.

At present we are close to fulfilling completely the objective of the disarmament pillar – the destruction of all chemical arsenals. Since the Convention's entry into force, eight States Parties have declared the possession of some 72,000 metric tonnes of the deadliest warfare agents known to humankind. The Technical Secretariat has confirmed the destruction of more than 96 percent of these stocks, all in a safe and environmentally-friendly manner.

For the two largest possessor states of the Russian Federation and the United States of America, significant progress has been made. As a major milestone, last year the Russian Federation completed its chemical demilitarisation program, concluding operations at its last destruction facility in September. The United States has so far eliminated more than 90 percent of its stocks and is on track to finish by its planned completion date of 2023.

Confidence in the effectiveness of the Convention is high, and this has translated into near universality. As of today, the CWC has 192 States Parties, which is the highest level of support of any disarmament treaty. More importantly, this means that 98 percent of all men, women, and children on this planet enjoy the CWC's protection.

I would like to point out that even with such high membership, universality remains a key priority. The DPRK, Egypt, Israel, and South Sudan – are outside the CWC.

The absence of even these few countries, nonetheless, could lead to proliferation risks and eventually undermine the Convention's aims. Accordingly, we try to engage with and have encouraged all of them to join our efforts for a safer and more secure world. South Sudan has assured us that it is close to acceding and we anticipate that it will be a State Party in the near future.

Trust in the Convention is created by the knowledge that it is being faithfully adhered to. This trust is built upon the foundation of one of the most extensive verification systems ever devised for a disarmament treaty. The OPCW inspectorate has established a reputation for professionalism and impartiality through 3,500 inspections of industrial sites in more than 80 States Parties. This has fostered a 'culture of verification', which has been founded on close consultation with the chemical industry. Verification, as such, is the keystone of two of the Convention's pillars. It serves not only the goals of disarmament, but also non-proliferation by ensuring that dual-use chemicals are not diverted to prohibited activities. This includes monitoring the transfers of such material.

In order to maximise the economic and technological benefits from the CWC, the Organisation also promotes international cooperation in the peaceful uses of chemistry. Although the OPCW is not a development agency the capacity building activities help to keep a large number of countries engaged in its work. One such successful initiative has been the Africa Programme. Launched in 2007, it has been important for raising awareness and developing a community of experts knowledgeable about the CWC, furthering support for treaty implementation across the African continent.

Even though many of these activities and achievements have occurred outside the public spotlight, the international community has recognised their value to international security. In 2013, the Nobel Committee awarded the OPCW the Peace Prize for its efforts in chemical disarmament.

The Prize came at an extremely uncertain time for the Organisation, as it coincided with the start of one of its most ambitious and difficult missions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Success does not come without hurdles. At each obstacle, the OPCW has had to learn to adapt to new circumstances, as well as to rely upon cooperation with others. The United Nations has been a constant partner in many of our activities. No situation has tested the Organisation more, or demonstrated the value of its partnerships better than the OPCW's mission in Syria.

In Syria, the OPCW was entrusted with the unprecedented task of coordinating and verifying a demilitarisation process within a compressed timeframe and amidst an active civil war. There were no standard operating procedures and guidebooks for what we were attempting to do.

Although the Secretariat had prepared itself for different scenarios, without close international cooperation, Syria would have been mission impossible. Following decisions in the OPCW Executive Council and the UN Security Council mandating the dismantlement of Syria's

chemical weapons programme, I discussed with then UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki Moon, how these decisions would be implemented. This brought about the establishment of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria, which saw close collaboration between our personnel to safely remove, transport, and destroy Syria's chemical warfare agents.

On the ground, the inspectors and other staff of the Secretariat faced considerable security risks and encountered extremely tough conditions. Despite this, they completed the task of verifying the destruction of 1,300 metric tonnes of toxic chemicals and their precursors in less than 12 months. This work was also heavily reliant on the technical, financial, and in-kind support from 30 States Parties, including Austria and the European Union.

Syria's final batch of declared chemical agents was neutralised in August 2014; however, the OPCW's mission did not end there. Due to credible reports of chemicals being used as weapons in Syria, in April 2014 a Fact-Finding Mission was formed to assess these allegations. Over the past four years, the FFM has investigated multiple incidents in Syria, confirming the use of chlorine as a weapon and last year of sarin in attacks on Khan Shaykhun and Ltamenah.

I should add that while these attacks were barbaric, the role of the FFM is not to search for the perpetrators. Violators of the global legal norm against chemical weapons – whoever they are – must be held accountable for their actions. This sentiment was shared by the international community and led to the Security Council forming in 2015 the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, otherwise known as 'the JIM', to identify those who were responsible for these gross violations in Syria. The JIM has further investigated the allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and submitted its reports to the Security Council in 2016 and 2017.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we look to the future, the OPCW will continue to deliver on our core business in the service of our States Parties. Routine inspections will go on. Monitoring of declarations will continue. And the Technical Secretariat will still assist the States Parties in implementing their CWC obligations. With the progress on stockpiles moving ever nearer to the ultimate goal of global zero, the OPCW is necessarily shifting its main focus away from disarmament towards preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

This particular challenge, however, should not be considered as a new one since it has been a grave concern for some decades. The sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 awakened the world to the potential of non-state actors developing and using sophisticated chemical warfare agents. This is an issue that still haunts us today.

In Syria, the FFM and the JIM were able to determine that the terrorist group ISIL employed sulphur mustard, a Category 1 chemical weapon, during attacks in 2015 and 2016. The Secretariat has also confirmed the use of sulphur mustard in Iraq by ISIL. With the near total defeat of ISIL in Syria and Iraq, the danger of returning fighters is now a real concern both here in Europe and elsewhere. The possibility of individuals and groups acquiring toxic chemicals to conduct acts of terrorism is a stark reality that we must prepare for and prevent.

Even though the CWC is not specifically tailored to address terrorism, let me emphasise that the Convention is flexible enough to allow the OPCW to meet this challenge. The full and effective implementation of the CWC by all States Parties would be a significant contribution to countering chemical terrorist threat. Within the Organisation, an Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism has been operating since 2001. In 2015, a Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors was also formed to bring greater clarity to this issue and recommend concrete measures to the States Parties.

For some States Parties, however, the experience of a chemical terrorism attack could overwhelm their emergency-response services. Additionally, in a chemical incident, quickly and accurately identifying the pertinent compound can quite literally mean the difference between life and death.

In response to these needs, under the third pillar Art. X of the CWC the Secretariat established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission to swiftly help States Parties upon their request to cope with a chemical attack carried out by a non-state actor, such as a terrorist group. The RRAM, as we refer to it, will play two major roles: it will assist emergency services upon the request of the State Party concerned and conduct sampling and analysis to pinpoint the toxic chemical.

Terrorism is a trans-national and cross-cutting issue that does not naturally fall under the responsibility of a single organisation. As such, the OPCW has recognised the need to step up its cooperation with other international organisations to prevent chemicals from being used as weapons of terror. This would enable us to avoid duplications and ensure complementarity.

We actively collaborate with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF), which helps us and over a dozen other international organisations to coordinate our responses to WMD terrorism threats. We collaborate and interact with the UN 1540 Committee, and see that its obligations on non-state actors correspond with the general provisions under the CWC.

Controls on the trade in chemicals relevant to the Convention are also important to prevent toxic substances falling into the wrong hands. Accordingly, to strengthen the international transfer regime, in January last year the OPCW signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Customs Organisation.

Forging links with other international organisations is critical to ensuring interoperability and efficiency in suppressing acts of terrorism. In this area I believe the OPCW can in fact do more. In particular, I would like to see the OPCW deepen its engagement with the European Union in the area of counter-terrorism. Presently, the EU supports the OPCW through its Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. But there is a great deal of scope to expand this relationship, through such initiatives as the EU's CBRN Centres of Excellence.

Dealing with this complex problem will require collective efforts involving States Parties, the Secretariat, and key stakeholders like the scientific community and the chemical industry.

Our engagement with the scientific community is of high importance. Progress in life sciences is advancing at an astounding pace, creating incredible opportunities for the betterment of humanity – as well as dire risks. The OPCW must keep up with these developments.

The Scientific Advisory Board, whose role is to counsel the Director-General and the Secretariat on scientific issues relevant to the Convention, is one way that we maintain our knowledge of the latest discoveries and breakthroughs that could – for better or worse – impact the Convention. For example, the most recent Advisory Board meeting focused on topics as diverse as new techniques for eliminating toxic substances and the application of new tools to OPCW verification activities.

Another critical component of the OPCW's efforts to remain ahead of the changes in science is the OPCW Laboratory.

As one of the cornerstones of the CWC's verification system, it is vital to our mission that the equipment and facilities used by our chemists in the OPCW and designated laboratories benefit from the advances in science. Consequently, the OPCW has launched a project to upgrade its Laboratory to a 'Centre for Chemistry and Technology'. Bolstering and expanding the Lab with additional capabilities will keep the OPCW and its network of labs fit for purpose well into the future.

It is also hoped that by upgrading the OPCW Laboratory we will create a global hub for experts through research activities. We have recognised that the OPCW must improve engagement with the scientific community and other stakeholders. For this reason, an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach was created to formulate practical recommendations on strategies, tools, and activities to raise awareness among relevant professionals and the future generations of scientists.

Without the commitment of chemists and engineers to the CWC, the OPCW's efforts to grapple with the advances in science would be futile. It was on this basis, that two years ago the OPCW signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance cooperation with the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry,(IUPAC) which is a global institution that provides objective scientific expertise.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world is a safer place because of the work carried out by the OPCW and its States Parties under the CWC. However, as we grow ever closer towards ridding the world of chemical weapons, we must not become complacent. Recent events in Syria and other countries have demonstrated that the international norm against chemical weapons is not immune from erosion. We must be mindful of these pressures and be vigilant against those who actively seek to undermine international peace and security.

The OPCW will continue to work with our partners—UN agencies and bodies, the scientific community, and industry—to ensure the CWC is truly a permanent barrier against chemical weapons. Nonetheless, what I hope I have conveyed to you today is the idea that while the

challenges the Convention confronts may be constantly evolving, the OPCW has proven to be adaptable and dynamic enough to meet them head on.

I thank you for your attention.

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